DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 123 597 CS 002 683

AUTHOR Crowl, Lynda C.
TITLE Learning Skills Centers in Kansas Vocational Schools.
PUB DATE May 76
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Reading Association (21st, Anaheim, California, May 10-14, 1976)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Basic Skills; Educationally Disadvantaged; Junior Colleges; *Learning Laboratories; Post Secondary Education; Remedial Instruction; *Remedial Programs; *Skill Centers; Vocational Development; *Vocational Education; *Vocational Schools
IDENTIFIERS *Kansas

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses learning skills centers in Kansas connected with area vocational-technical schools and community junior colleges. These centers are designed to offer basic skills instruction in reading, composition, math, and study skills areas to students who cannot succeed in a vocational program because of deficiencies in one or all of these areas. The students who use these centers are classified as educationally disadvantaged by the fact that they cannot succeed without special help with skills traditionally classified as academic. Each of the basic skills centers is different and each strives to make its curriculum meet the needs of the vocational students and instructors it serves. There are, however, characteristics that are present in all basic skills programs. They are to accept the students for what they are, to tailor the instruction to fit the individual needs of the students, and to provide basic skills instruction relevant to help students find success in their chosen vocational fields. (TS)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED123597

LEARNING SKILLS CENTERS IN KANSAS VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS

Lynda C. Crowl, Instructor
Kaw Area Vocational-Technical School
Topeka, Kansas
May 13, 1976

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Lynda C. Crowl

TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER."

CS 202 683

LEARNING SKILLS CENTERS IN KANSAS VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS

Over the past six years, Kansas has developed a network of learning skills centers connected with area vocational-technical schools and community junior colleges. These centers are designed to offer basic skills instruction in the reading, composition, math, and study skills areas to students who cannot succeed in a vocational program because of deficiencies in one or all of these areas. The programs are funded through the Exemplary and Special Needs Section of the Vocational Education Division of the Kansas State Department of Education. The students who use these centers are classified educationally disadvantaged generally by the fact that they cannot succeed in the regular vocational area without special help with skills traditionally classified academic.

Each of the basic skills centers is different; each strives to make its curriculum meet the needs of the vocational students and instructors it serves. There are, however, characteristics that seem to be present in all basic skills programs. They are:

1. To accept the student where he is.
2. To tailor the instruction to fit the individual needs of that student.
3. To provide basic skills instruction relevant to helping that student be successful in his vocational class, i.e. in his chosen field.

Some years ago, it became evident that many students enrolled

in vocational and technical programs lacked the basic skills needed to function at their fullest potential. Research in Kansas indicates that a cross-section of the students entering the area vocational schools and community junior colleges after high school have about the same basic abilities. In fact, those entering vocational schools may even have a little higher proficiency. What has been encountered by vocational education, is that many post-secondary students have a high school diploma, but basic skills abilities far below the eleventh or twelfth grade level. Seven or eight years ago, we were assuming that basic education had taught academic skills such as math, reading, writing, and study skills, and that all vocational education was responsible for was teaching manipulative and technical skills and information. The vocational instructor knew that this was not the case, so it became necessary for students to have available this type of instruction in the vocational setting.

Prior to the establishment of learning skills centers, it was often a case of having a student who was motivated to learn having no opportunity to do so. The first objective, then, was to provide students the opportunity to receive instruction in the basic skill areas. Most vocational areas use manuals and textbooks that far exceed the reading level of many of the students who are to use them. Understanding of complex and technical vocabulary and math is necessary before the student can even begin to learn manipulative skills in many cases.

The ability to, independently, learn new procedures and techniques after leaving the school setting is important to students who are receiving training to take to the job market. Although the vocational instructor is very capable of teaching job-required skills, generally, he is not prepared to teach reading simultaneously.

The same situation is evident in the math area. In some vocational fields, it is necessary for the student to master a higher level of mathematics than has been encountered in previous math courses in formal education. The vocational instructor does not have the time or resources to teach math. An accumulation of instances such as these lead to vocational education's demanding that resources be available to teach students basic skills.

The concept of the basic skills center took shape to remedy the problems that the vocational instructor and student knew existed. What has happened to the original concept is that it has grown to include such services as expertise in materials development and mock interviewing using video tape to prepare students for job interviews. Essentially, the basic skills centers in many vocational schools and junior colleges have become a place where a student or instructor can say, "I need instruction or help in this area," and, in some way, an attempt is made to furnish what has been requested.

There seems to be two major reasons that a student is successful in the learning skills center in the vocational setting:

1. Motivation to read materials that interest him and are relevant to what he plans to do on his job.
2. The vocational instructor's urging.

Much of the work done in the skills center involves materials, manuals and textbooks, which students are using in their content-area classes. Reading skills can be taught from these materials easily, although time is required for the development of materials. The reinforcement in the vocational class gives the student added motivation for his reading activities in the skills center.

The second major type of motivation the student receives is support from his vocational instructor. Although he has been told in the past that reading and math are important, having an automechanics instructor tell him, makes it much more sensible to the student. In many cases vocational instructors are requiring that a student complete a reading assignment and take a test over the material before the student can go to the shop to apply the theory in the text.

The flexibility built into a skills center as an original concept enables it to suit the needs of students and instructors. Not only does it take facilities and materials to meet a wide range of needs, it must be staffed by personnel willing to maintain the flexibility. The ideal situation for a skills center

is an environment where all content areas are individualized. This is important because it allows the student who requires much repetition the time he needs. If the time in the skills center simply throws him farther behind, it becomes a hinderance rather than a help to the student.

Some problems have been encountered in building successful learning skills centers. One problem is the one just mentioned which occurs when the content areas are not totally individualized. There are many reasons that a course is not individualized. An inflexible state or local standard that requires that a certain amount of material be covered in a given time period is one problem. Failure to set up content-area programs to help with instruction in this manner is another reason. The requirements for complete individualization include time to develop materials on this format sufficient to serve as resources for students and a physical plant large enough to allow many activities to take place at the same time.

Another problem we have encountered is trying to transfer a "package" situation from one location where it is working well to a new environment. The problems occur because every school is unique and has needs that are special. Some specific problems encountered here involve such things as scheduling. Some of the learning skills centers are in schools that function on a very strict schedule, and the students in these centers are enrolled much like any other class. Others operate on a completely open enrollment system where the student may come to

the center for any amount of time for any number of days depending on the goals he has defined for himself in a conference with the skills instructor. Another problem with trying to transfer a "package" is that the person who is to coordinate the skills center must totally understand the concept. Up to this time, we in Kansas feel that the only way to train staff for learning skills centers is for them to work in a center for a period of time.

In spite of the problems involved, research in Kansas reveals that students in vocational schools which have learning skills centers, show two times as much improvement in reading skills as students in a vocational school with no learning skills center. This study was based on pre- and post-test scores on a standardized reading test. In Kansas it seems that, in part, because of learning skills centers, vocational education and junior colleges are becoming more academic; perhaps it should follow that academic education should become more vocational.